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SUBJECT: THE ELECTIONS ARE OVER; WHO IS IN PARLIAMENT NOW?

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN L. WITHERS II FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

1. (C) Summary: On August 1, the Central Election Commission (CEC) certified the June 28 parliamentary elections. The Democratic Party (DP) has 70 Members of Parliament, the Socialist Party (SP) 66, and the Movement for Socialist Integration (LSI) four. The DP and LSI will form a governing coalition. Now that the elections are officially (and finally) over, Post has taken a closer look at the new MPs. This diverse group of businessmen, family and friends, savvy political operators and only a few fresh faces will undoubtedly present difficult challenges for the Prime Minister's legislative agenda. End summary.

2. The June 28 election process has finally concluded after a contentious month of the final stages of the voting process in which the Socialist Party declared the elections "illegitimate." Post took a closer look at just who has been elected to make Albania's laws. By the numbers, the parliament will feature 70 DP, 66 SP, and four LSI coalition members. Women won 23 of the 140 available seats, up from eight in the last parliament. Eighty one MPs are new and 59 have been reelected. The June 28 elections were conducted under a new electoral code in which citizens voted for parties, rather than directly for candidates, which made for a different dynamic, especially on Election Day which was quiet. Both PM Sali Berisha and SP Leader Edi Rama largely handpicked every name on the parliamentary lists. Looking over the names on the list, four groups emerge: operators, businessmen, fresh faces, and relatives or friends.

THE OPERATORS

3. (C) The operators are the political veterans who have been playing the game for some time. On the ruling Democratic Party (DP) side these include names such as Jozefina Topalli and are MPs who have stood loyally by Berisha through some very challenging times, such as Gerdec, the Durres-Kukes road scandal, and other substantial problems. For the SP, this category divides further into construction magnates and older, more established politicians with smaller business interests. The former hold great sway in the SP and include names like Arta Dade and Ermelinda Meksi. The second group features people like Pandeli Majko, Arben Malaj, Ben Blushi, and Kastriot Islami who manage to maintain their political stature while also managing their own private businesses. This latter group has been the most critical of Rama after the election, perhaps because their businesses are not as dependent on Rama as others are.

THE BUSINESSMEN

4. (C) This category has the most colorful membership. The SP business people are easier to identify and are divided

into two groups: builders and "other business." The builders club keeps growing and includes not only several of the "operators" named above but also newer names that Rama brought in when he took over the SP. A good example is the Chairperson of the SP Parliamentary Group, Valentina Leskaj. Others in this group are only in the Rama camp for the money and may be more than willing to move to the other side if it benefits them. For example, one SP MP in Durres has already announced his intention to join the DP coalition. The "other business" group features MPs like Fidel Ylli, a former bodyguard who succeeded in making money from casinos and seems to have no connection to SP ideology. Lefter Koka of LSI is also a good example of the businessman turned MP. Finally, some MPs are simple thugs. These MPs have made their fortunes through various means and tend to switch parties if business requires. They can be very rich, have minimal education, and they can be violent. The classic example is Tom Doshi, who is the richest-declared MP with a fortune estimated at EUR 10 million, and who runs construction, pharmaceutical, and dairy businesses. He is also suspected of running some not so legal enterprises.

THE FRESH FACES

15. (C) The fresh faces are an intriguing group. Some were used to reach the 30 per cent quota of women on the parties' lists, as required by the Electoral Code, while others were used solely for their fresh faces. In many cases, they are real professionals, but in more cases they are novices. For the SP, names like former Albanian Helsinki Committee head Vasilika Hysi, Eglantina Gjermeni of the Gender Development

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Alliance Committee, or actor Luiza Xhuvani fit into this category. There are yet others with no noteworthy background, like Saimir Tahiri of the Party for Justice and Integration (PDI). For the DP, Gazmend Oketa is representative of the fresh face crowd. The new faces of both parties have many things in common: they tend to have studied abroad and they speak several foreign languages.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

16. (C) Finally, there are more than a few MPs who were put on the list simply due to party or personal loyalty and/or connections. For example, some are related to other active party members while others are friends of PM Berisha, his son or daughter or Edi Rama. A few others joined the SP since they had fallen out of favor with the PM or left the DP for other reasons.

COMMENT

17. (C) For both parties, the MPs, while elected by the people, were named personally by the party leader, i.e. Rama, Berisha, or Meta, giving the leaders extraordinary control over who becomes an MP. Whether or not this is positive will be known only after parliament begins its work in September. The fact that 81 MPs are newly elected is also noteworthy and it is not clear what this impact will have on the new parliament either. Clearly, many of the MPs were selected solely for their loyalty to the party bosses, so the prospect of bi-partisanship may be quite low. However, because of the narrow and relatively weak ruling coalition between the DP and LSI, cooperation and reaching across the aisle will be required for serious legislation. This coalition also marks the first time in Albania's history that a "leftwing" force (LSI) has combined with a "rightwing" one (DP).

WITHERS